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FLOOR DEBATE

March 18, 2004 LB 917, 1089

cooperative effort between that and the University of Nebraska, to still be administered at the University of Nebraska. It's very important to have the Nebraska Forestry Service in law, because it's...Nebraska can use it to fund and support firefighters across the state, especially their equipment. There has to be a mechanism for fire equipment to be loaned to rural fire departments particularly, and all fire departments that want them, I guess, that they may have...but it's particularly rural...to have access to this firefighting equipment via the federal government. So we must have this in place or we would lose all the federal support for our firefighting equipment across the state. And you know, it was particularly an issue the last two years, when we've had so many rural fires, when it was so dry. So it was thought...and I actually introduced the bill myself. This is my bill. But our committee felt that it was important to continue this. And so that's what we have in LB 917. We can't simply do the funding, which as I mentioned is in LB 1089, but it also is...needs a change in the law. And I'm going to...it does put in place four core programs that...and that's what this bill provides for: rural forestry assistance, which provides on-the-ground technical assistance to landowners needing forest management help; number two, it provides urban and community forestry, provides information and technical assistance to units of local government; number three, provides forest health protection, responsible for minimizing the spread of established invasive species and lessening the damage caused by the native insects and diseases; and its rural fire prevention and control program provides organizational assistance and cost-share funding for protective firefighting clothing and equipment and also reconditions military vehicles for firefighting purposes. And so this is what this LB 917 will do if we do advance the bill, either separately or as a package. I wanted to be sure we got some of these things in here. I'll spend some time this afternoon on some other issues. This was, again, LB 917. And I believe it's a very important aspect of this package that we continue this. Forestry is important to Nebraska. Trees are important to Nebraska. Firefighting equipment is important to Nebraska. Once again, it's a cooperative effort that's still housed on the University of Nebraska East Campus. But the funding will be a separate issue, separate earmark each year in